

## Nine-year-old Alone Banda works six days a week

**ALONE** (above and right) works in a quarry, crushing stone into powder.

In an abandoned quarry south of Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, children spend their days beating pieces of rock, slowly reducing them to gravel and powder. The output is on display beside many of Zambia's highways—waist-high piles of gravel, and bags packed with crushed stone or powder. The bags are sold to construction crews as a mixer for concrete, often to line swimming pools of Lusaka's wealthier residents.

A 9-year-old boy named Alone Banda does this miserable work at the quarry six days a week.

He takes football-size chunks of fractured rock and beats them into powder. In a good week he can make enough powder to fill half a bag. His grandmother sells each bag for 10,000 kwacha, less than \$3. Often, she says, Alone's work is the difference between eating and going hungry.

By the United Nations' latest estimate, more than 49 million sub-Saharan children age 14 and younger worked in 2004, which is 1.3 million more than in 2000. Their tasks

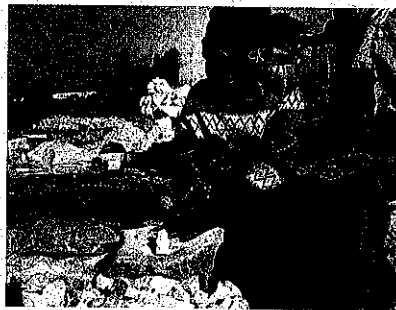
are not merely the housework and garden-tending common in most developing (and developed) societies. They are prostitutes, miners, construction workers, pesticide sprayers, haulers, street vendors, full-time servants, and they are not necessarily even paid for their labor. In Kenya, nearly a third of the coffee pickers were children; a 2001 World Bank Report found. In Tanzania, 25,000 children worked in hazardous jobs on plantations and in mines.

Across the globe, the number of children forced to work is in sharp decline. In Asia, the number has dropped by 5 million in just four years. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the decline was even more drastic, nearly 12 million. Sub-Saharan Africa is the exception.

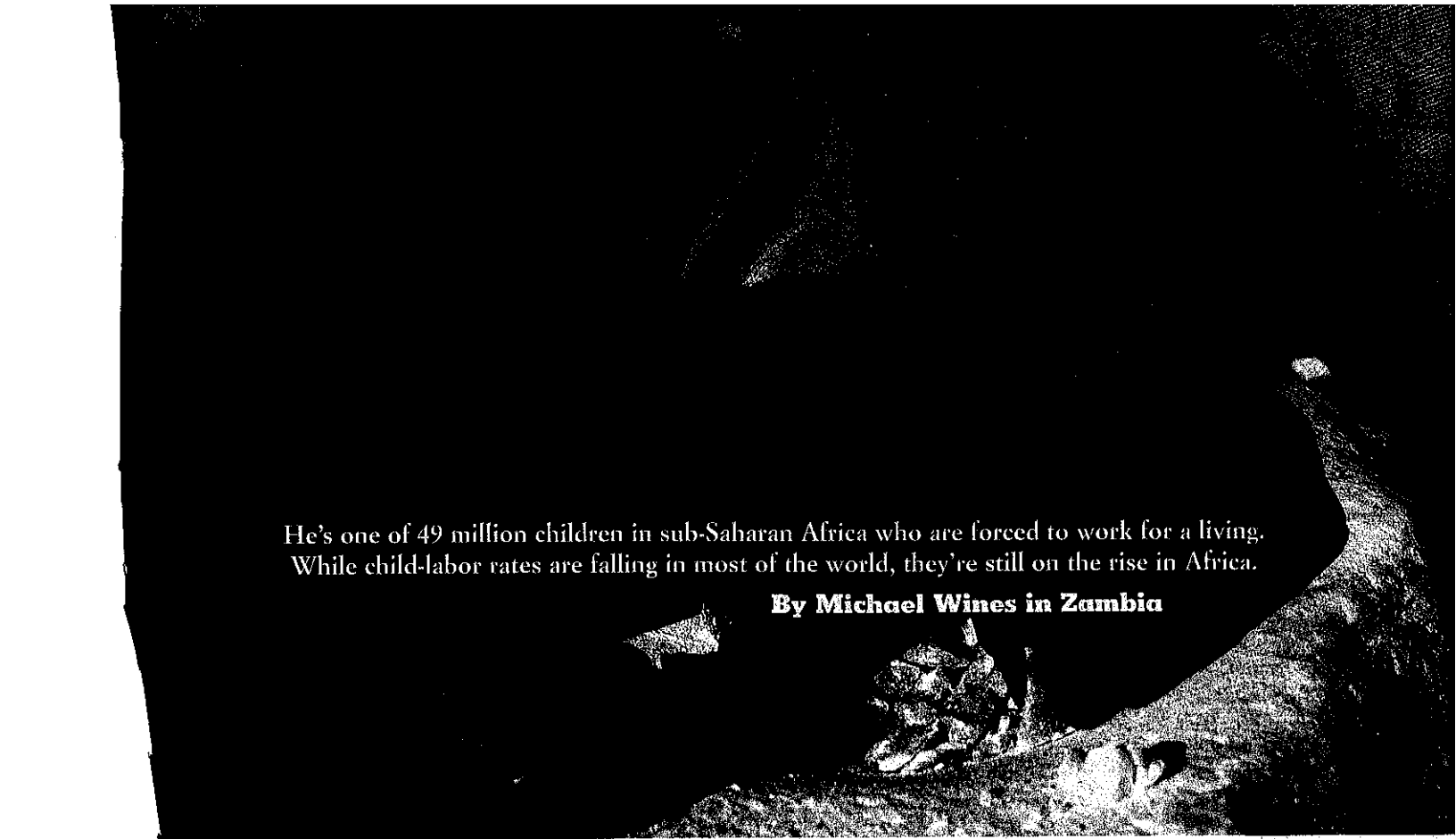
### WHY AFRICA IS DIFFERENT

Why is the number of child workers growing in Africa, while it is declining everywhere else? Child labor declines with prosperity, and so Africa's economic plight—44 percent of sub-Saharan residents live on less than \$1 a day—is a big reason.

But there are others: Hard work by children is the social norm, and conflicts scatter families and kill breadwinners.



**IN SUB-SAHARAN Africa, more than 49 million children are forced to work.**



He's one of 49 million children in sub-Saharan Africa who are forced to work for a living. While child-labor rates are falling in most of the world, they're still on the rise in Africa.

**By Michael Wines in Zambia**

There is also the problem of AIDS, which has created millions of orphans who must work to survive, and has forced millions more to work to support dying parents.

Alone and his grandmother rise at about 6:30 a.m. and make the half-hour walk to the quarry. Alone describes his day in the most basic English: "I break the rocks. I get up early in the morning, before the sun rises. For breakfast, I drink tea sometimes. This morning, I didn't eat. I'm hungry."

After two hours, he walks to Tatwasha Basic School, a state-run institution near his home, where he is in second grade. Tatwasha has 3,000 students. About 300 work in the quarries. "Most of these children are orphans," says Maureen Chinjenge, the school's headmistress.

After school, Alone returns to the quarry where he attacks his pile of rocks for five more hours, until sunset. A scab marks his left cheek, damage from a sliver of rock that flew into his face after an especially hard strike.

Other stone-crushers complain of broken fingers, impaired vision, or a "heavy chest," an early sign of lung disease, but Alone says he has suffered no serious injuries

beyond some smashed fingers and cut eyes. "It's a hard job," he says. "I hurt myself sometimes."

If the stereotype of child labor is an *Oliver Twist* world of sweatshops with youngsters bent over sewing machines or metal presses, Africa's reality is different.

In Lusaka, a city of 1.2 million, the number of child laborers is growing. "We see a lot of child-headed households as a result of H.I.V.," says Yvonne Chilufya, a project manager for Jesus Cares Ministries, a Zambian organization that assists street children and other child laborers.

"In other cases, you find the parents are both alive, but doing nothing, chronically ill. So the children are taking care of the parents. The parents send the children out to find food."

The last time Zambia's government counted, in 1999, it found nearly 600,000 child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17. Almost all were unpaid. On paper, at least, most were illegal: Zambian law forbids labor by children under 13, and



*Michael Wines covers Africa for The New York Times.*



Alone attends four hours a day has 3,000 students. About 300 work in the quarries.

allows those between 13 and 15 to engage only in light work. Chöla J. Chabala, the Zambian official charged with reducing child labor, says the number of children who work is growing despite his government's efforts.

"I do this job with a passion, but it is very depressing at the end of the day," he says. "I've heard children who work as prostitutes say they would rather die from AIDS because it is slower than dying of hunger."

### NO ELECTRICITY, NO TOILET

Crushing stone is considered one of the worst forms of child labor, full of risks from flying rock fragments, misdirected hammers, and years of inhaling dust. Like prostitution, it is a job undertaken for survival, not profit.

The quarries have their own economy: Men split boulders into smaller chunks, then sell them to women whose families reduce them to gravel and powder. Homeless and unsupervised children hire themselves out for about 30 cents a day to help with the crushing.

Alone lives with his grandmother, Mary

Mulelema, in a single room, perhaps 8 by 12 feet. There is no electricity. Pencils of sunshine streaming through holes in the corrugated asbestos roof supply the only light. There is no toilet; the stench of human waste wafts upward from bushes outside. Water is hauled in from a community tap. Mulelema sleeps on the couch; Alone sleeps on the concrete floor.

He has been living with his grandmother since his mother died in 2001. His father is a mystery.

The two or three bags of rock powder that Alone can produce in a month bring in almost enough to pay the \$11 a month for rent and access to the community water tap.

Sales of the gravel she produces earn barely enough money to buy corn meal and small, dried fish that the two eat for dinner. "We don't eat breakfast every day," she says. "At lunch we have sweet potatoes, and then we wait for supper. If I decide to have my breakfast, it means I won't have anything for supper."

For Mulelema, Alone's work in the quarries and the money it provides is literally the difference between eating and going hungry, and a hair's-breadth difference at that. **Q**

